

A Study of the Early Modern Samurai Honorary Ranking System: The Movement to Promote Ikeda Tsunamasa

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Introduction

Interpretations of the system for honorary ranking military houses (*daimyo*, *hatamoto*, retainers) vary widely depending on the individual historian. According to some, the honorary ranking system was simply a formality and therefore devoid of meaning. Others argue that the mere existence of the system meant the continued existence of the court and Emperor, which had entered an extreme state of decline, and therefore the honorary ranking system was extremely important. Which of these positions is correct?

Even in the Edo period when the Shogun ruled all Japan, *daimyo* received appointments of court rank. At the apex of this honorary ranking system was the Emperor, and the Shogun and largest *daimyo* were ranked under him. So in form, the Emperor appointed the Shogun and large *daimyo*, and the court issued a variety of commissions: proclamations (*kuzen'an*), court rank certification (*iki*), and Imperial commands (*senji*). If we stress this formal aspect, in the Edo period the Emperor was lord and he was in command of the honorary ranking system.

However, I believe that this perspective is mistaken. That is because the agent who determined court appointments of *daimyo* was the Bakufu. Even in the appointment of courtiers (*kuge*) to high rank, the permission of the Bakufu was necessary. The court and Emperor were informed by the Bakufu as to which appointments of *daimyo* should be made and they only prepared their documents as ordered. In addition, and distinct from the case of the courtiers, even though the *bushi* were appointed to a court rank this did not form a master-follower relationship. Although the honorary rank names were the same as for the court, the ranking of *bushi* had unique elements, too. If we stress this actual facet of the system, we can understand that the Edo Bakufu created this honorary ranking system and through it controlled *daimyo*. At that time, the Shogun, *daimyo*, and court all understood that the Shogun granted honorary ranks to the *bushi*.

Thus the early modern honorary ranking system is a significant element of the relationship between Bakufu and *daimyo* for us to investigate. Within the ranks of earlier scholarship there are those who would agree with me. However, these earlier studies generally approach this subject from the point of view of the Bakufu. Thus, although they have illuminated Bakufu policies on the honorary ranking system and the consciousness of the Bakufu, They have not clarified the consciousness of the *daimyo* and the domain (*han*) perspectives of the honorary ranking system. The perspectives of the domains on the honorary ranking system were distinct from those of the Bakufu. Furthermore, we must also consider qualitative differences among the various types of *daimyo*: including *fudai*, *tozama*, and others.

Here I will examine the perspectives of daimyo on the issue of court rank appointments. The principal documents I have examined for this project are from the *Ikeda-ke bunko hansei shiryō* (Ikeda Library Domain Administrative Documents). The movement to promote Ikeda Tsunamasa in honorary rank is, within this body of material, the oldest specific example of such a movement. Based on the use of this clutch of documents, which we can say are among the best concerning the honorary ranking system of the early modern military houses, I wish to reconsider the ranking of *bushi* in the early modern state, and open a new facet in interpretations of the relationship between Bakufu and domain.

The Movement to Promote Ikeda Tsunamasa to Rank of Shōshō

On the fifth day of the twelfth month of Genroku 9 (1696), Ikeda Tsunamasa, daimyo of Okayama in Bizen Province (about 320,000 *koku*), just arrived at Edo Castle, was informed orally of his promotion from the honorary rank of *jijū* to *shōshō* by the Senior Counselor (*rōjū*) of the Shogun. This kind of year-end appointment to a new honorary rank was a customary observance of the New Year's festivities at Edo Castle.

This raising or lowering of honorary rank determined the treatment of daimyo who participated in Bakufu ceremonies and processions. The mid-eighteenth century incident in which the Date family, daimyo of Sendai domain in Mutsu Province (about 600,000 *koku*), and the Shimazu family, daimyo of the Kagoshima domain in Satsuma Province (about 730,000 *koku*), consumed themselves in mutual rivalry for promotion in honorary rank, is a famous example of the competition that the honorary ranking system engendered.

Before proceeding further, let me first indicate the basic structure of the early modern honorary ranking of military houses. These are presented in Table I. We can group them into four basic levels, each of which contained smaller, but still significant, differences in ranks:

First level: *Dajōdaijin* (Grand Minister) to *Naidaijin* (Interior Minister)

Second level: *Dainagon* (Grand Counselor) to *Sanji* (Consultant)

Third level: *Chūjō* (Lieutenant General) to *Shihon* (Fourth Rank)

Fourth level: *Shōtaifu* (Stewards)

Of these, *chūjō* and *shōshō* were originally military offices and the others were civil offices. However, in the early modern honorary ranking system of the military houses, there was no distinction between military and civil ranks. With the exception of a very short period of time in the early Edo period, appointments to the rank of *Naidaijin* and higher went only to Shogun, and those ranks from *Chūnagon* and *Dainagon* went only to the families of Shogunal blood-related (*shimpan*) domains. Because they were incorporated into a master-servant relationship based on appointment to Bakufu office posts such as Senior Counselor (*rōjū*) and the like, these were the highest ranks to which a *fudai* daimyo could aspire. Many daimyo were appointed *shōtaifu* but almost on one other than daimyo was appointed to this honorary rank.

At the time of the efforts to persuade the Bakufu to promote him to *shōshō*, Tsunamasa requested the cooperation of the Bakufu *sobayōnin* (Managerial Secretary) Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu. The actual negotiations were undertaken by the respective senior representatives of their retainer band (*kashin*). On the Okayama side was Edo

rusuiyaku (Edo House Manager) Yoshizaki Jimbei, and on the Yanagisawa side were two of his highest-ranking retainers, the *karō* Hiraoka Sukechika and Yabuta Shigemori.

The first step in the negotiations began when a formal request (*gansho*, Document A) from Tsunamasa was brought to Hiraoka and Yabuta and the two of them agreed to review it. This was designed to obtain the agreement of the Shogun and Yanagisawa on the content of the request. The two offered a broad array of suggestions and Tsunamasa rewrote the request based on their guidance. This new request (Document B) was then carried to Yanagisawa's Edo residence and presented to him. Yanagisawa, receiving this request, promised Tsunamasa his cooperation. It is thought that after this the second request was presented to Shogun Tsunayoshi through Yanagisawa's good offices. Subsequently Tsunamasa's request for promotion to *shōshō* was granted. This was all a result of receiving the assistance of Yanagisawa's two *karō* in revising the original draft.

Thus, the first draft written by Tsunamasa reflects the consciousness of a daimyo seeking promotion in honorary rank. Conversely, the request, rewritten based on the suggestions of Hiraoka and Yabuta reflects the Bakufu consciousness of rank promotion.

Let us investigate the content of these two documents.

According to Document A, there were two reasons that Tsunamasa desired promotion to *shōshō*. The first reason was that his own son's first rank (the one received upon the formal attainment of manhood, *gempuku*, the first time one was eligible to receive a formal honorary rank) was *shōtaifu*, and such low ranking was not a credit to his ancestors. Second was opposition to the earlier promotion of Tsunakiyo, daimyo of the Okayama branch Tottori domain, to *shōshō* before Tsunamasa himself had received this rank. In addition to attempting to have Tsunamasa promoted to the same honorary rank that Tsunakiyo had received earlier, because Tsunamasa was head of the main branch of the family, this was also an effort to have the Bakufu clearly distinguish Okayama domain as superior in rank to Tottori.

Regarding the first point, for generation after generation the first honorary rank of an Ikeda daimyo had been *jijū*, and there had been no initial ranks at the lower level of *shōtaifu*. However, since at this time the Bakufu policy regarding honorary ranks was to move in the direction of granting daimyo lower ranks, the possibilities were great that Tsunamasa's son would be appointed *shōtaifu*. In order to protect against this, Tsunamasa thought that it was necessary for himself to receive a position in rank.

Concerning the second point, since Tsunamasa was nine years older than Tsunakiyo, he had been made *jijū* eight years earlier than Tsunakiyo. However, in the previous year Tsunakiyo had been appointed *shōshō* before Tsunamasa.

The justifications for Tsunamasa's promotion evident in the first draft of the request deal only with problems within Okayama domain and within the Ikeda family. It is significant that at no point in this document is there any expression of a consciousness of being a subject of the Emperor or of service in response to Shogunal blessings. Therefore this draft request indicates that the daimyo consciousness of honorary rank was one of relative position to the other daimyo and maintenance of status within a family.

Let us next look at the second and ultimately successful request. In this document it is clearly stated that appointment of honorary ranks is a Shogunal blessing. Furthermore, Tsunamasa requests the promotion to *shōshō*

and once again vows to serve the Bakufu faithfully. The surprising element is that the content of the first document is completely expunged from the second.

The fact that a request incorporates all of the points insisted on by the recipient in order to achieve one's desire is probably fairly standard across time and place. In negotiations between domain and Bakufu, too, daimyo must have had to hide their true voice behind a public facade (*tatemaie*). Analyzing this only from the Bakufu's side, and then treating it as the actual voice of the daimyo would be to commit a serious error, since daimyo presented their requests in the public facade of the Bakufu's consciousness.

In earlier research there is an understanding that the real power of respect for the Bakufu and the Shogun can be appreciated through the appointment of daimyo to honorary ranks. According to this perspective, the role of the honorary rank system was to circumvent and control a certain opposition and contradiction in the relationship between domains and Bakufu and to strengthen the ties between domain and Bakufu. However, saying that in return for service to the Bakufu the daimyo received appointments of honorary rank is nothing more than taking at face value what is a public facade of representing the Bakufu perspective. That daimyo placed importance on the honorary rank system is, of course, correct, but this was not because they held the Shogun and Emperor in respect. To daimyo, the honorary rank system was a fundamental measure of their place relative to other daimyo and a support for family status. That is, through the honorary rank system the Shogun sought to control daimyo, but daimyo saw it as an element of the lateral relationship among daimyo themselves more than as a function of their relationship with the Shogun.

In addition, in other previous research there is an understanding that sees legitimation of the daimyo's right to rule his domain as stemming from his holding court rank. This perspective tends to treat lightly the fact that the Shogun determined daimyo appointments to honorary ranks. Furthermore, this understanding is contradicted by the fact that in the Genroku era there were daimyo who did not receive appointments to court rank. The Shogun Tsunayoshi failed to appoint some to honorary ranks, perhaps in order to break daimyo management of their lands. Moreover, the reason for daimyo not having honorary rank was not the village disturbances (*ikki*) had occurred in their domains. Tsunayoshi sought to lower daimyo honorary ranks in order to increase the authority of the Shogun relative to them.

Conclusion

In this article we have investigated the early modern honorary rank system for military houses from the perspective of the integration of daimyo based on materials found in the domain documents of the Ikeda Family Library. As a result, we have been able to discern a daimyo attitude toward the honorary rank system that differs from that of the Bakufu. To daimyo, this rank system was a fundamental means to maintain the position of a house among related families and a way to measure position among daimyo. As was the case in the rivalry between the Date of Sendai domain and the Shimazu of Satsuma domain, we see a rivalry between Okayama domain and the Ikeda family branch of Tottori domain. The daimyo appear to have wanted promotion in rank for reasons other than out of respect for the Emperor and Shogun.

However, the conclusions of this presentation do not suggest that the authority of daimyo was relatively autonomous of the Bakufu. Rather in the point of the daimyo having superficially to represent the Bakufu perspective,

I believe we find an indication of the fundamental character of the Bakufu-domain relationship—the autocratic character of the Bakufu. Not only in the second request, but after his promotion to *shōshō*, Tsunamasa repeatedly and continually had to express his subservience to the Bakufu. The overwhelming character of Bakufu authority is indicated by the enforcement of daimyo humility in requests made to the Bakufu as well as by the necessity for daimyo to perform in such a way as to heighten Bakufu authority.

Finally, we must offer some explanation as to why daimyo so strongly desired honorary ranks that were only one standard for indicating house ranking. Among standards for indication daimyo house rank in addition to court rank, we have domain putative value (*kokudaka*), size of domain territory, seating order at official functions at Edo castle, among other indicators. Each of these was closely associated with daimyo house status, but were difficult to change, or to use to advance one's position. In contrast, the court ranks not only reflected household status but also were associated with the daimyo as individuals and therefore could be changed and used to advance daimyo themselves. In other words, there was no measure better than advancing in court rank, if one wished to advance relative to other daimyo and support one's house state.

In closing, we must here note the difference between *fudai* and *tozama* daimyo. It was possible for *fudai* daimyo to be appointed to Bakufu office, but *tozama* could not receive such appointments. To *fudai* daimyo, such promotion to Bakufu offices was a very meaningful standard for measuring household status. In contrast, for the *tozama* daimyo there was no other route than advancement in court rank. Therefore, while all daimyo desired court rank appointments, those who were most concerned about them were the *tozama* daimyo. Movements to promote daimyo in court rank were largely among *tozama* daimyo, and Ikeda Tsunamasa was one of these.

Table I

Organization of Daimyo Honorary Ranks

First Level

Dajōdaijin (Grand Minister)

Sadaijin (Minister of the Left)

Udaijin (Minister of the Right)

Naidaijin (Interior Minister)

Second Level

Dainagon (Grand Counselor)

Chūnagon (Middle Counselor)

Sangi (Consultant)



Third Level

Chūjō (Lieutenant General)

Shōshō (Commander)

Jijū (Chamberlain)

Shihon (Fourth Rank)

Fourth Level

Shotaifu (Stewards)

Document A

(Draft Request for Promotion, presented by Yoshizaki to Yanagisawa, dated ninth lunar month, twelfth day of Genroku 9 [1696]; Japanese text may be found reprinted in Hori Shin, "Okayama han to buke kan'i: Ikeda Tsunamasa no shōshō shōshin wo megutte," *Shikan* 133 [September 1995]: 7-8.)

The heads of the Ikeda house have for generations been appointed to *jijū* rank as their first appointment (*shokan*) and have never been appointed *shotaifu*. Until the time of the fourth Shogun Ietsuna, there were requests from the Bakufu about the history of first appointments for each daimyo house. Perhaps because appointments of *bushi* to honorary ranks were a formality and did not involve appointment to administrative office, we have heard that it is difficult to receive the same honorary rank as that held by our father. However, in my generation, although it is said that the Shogun has not been displeased with us, the appointment of our son to *shotaifu* would be incomprehensible to our ancestors. Therefore we first request promotion for ourselves to the honorary rank of *shōshō*.

Next, a second reason concerns the relationship with our relatives, the Ikeda family, daimyo of Tottori domain. The Ikeda Tottori daimyo family are maternal relatives of the Tokugawa family, but they are also a branch family of the Ikeda house. Until the age of Tsunamasa's father, Mitsumasa, Mitsunaka (*n.b.*, an earlier Tottori daimyo) and the Tottori domain retainers all understood this. However, since the promotion of Tsunakiyo (*n.b.*, current daimyo of Tottori) to *shōshō*, the daimyo of Tottori domain has acted as though there were no relationship between Okayama and Tottori domains, and they discuss nothing with the Okayama domain. If things remain as they are, no matter what kind of event befalls the Tottori domain, they will probably discuss nothing with Okayama domain. This is highly regrettable. Since these are the circumstances, even if I (*n.b.*, Tsunamasa) am promoted to *shōshō*, after Tsunakiyo, conditions will remain the same. If we might make an additional request, it is to underscore

the importance for both the Okayama and Tottori families that you order that, as heretofore, the Okayama daimyo leads the Tottori daimyo and preserves the relationship of main house and branch house among the Ikeda family.

Document B

(Request for Promotion, written and presented by Ikeda Tsunamasa along with an Ikeda house genealogy to Yanagisawa, dated ninth lunar month, sixteenth day of Genroku 9 [1696]; Japanese text may be found reprinted in Hori, "Okayama han to buke kan'i," 10.)

I, Tsunamasa, have received numerous Shogunal blessings, and as his humble servant, I cannot adequately express my gratitude. Yet if he should deign to promote me to *shōshō*, I will henceforth even more endeavor gladly to serve him in whatever capacity he may desire. Therefore I earnestly implore that this promotion be granted. I have not discussed this matter at all with the Senior Counselors (*rōjū*), and I have trusted only Yanagisawa, relying on him alone to make this request to the Shogun on my behalf.